



Palestinian Teachers in America—A Cross Cultural Exchange

Pre-departure Briefing

Before embarking on their exciting journey to the United States, the teachers spent an entire day at the pre-departure orientation at RI-SOL's office in Ramallah.

The teachers were among very few educators who have a chance to travel to the United States to enhance their skills, and this made them feel very special. When visited by the Director of the Training Department of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Ghazi Abu Sharkh, the teachers promised to bring all the training materials from the US back to Palestine to share their knowledge and skills with the Ministry as well as with other teachers.

Besides learning about the logistics of their trip, the teachers also shared their excitement and fears. They were most excited about the fact that they would explore the American educational system



firsthand by seeing how American schools function, how teachers prepare for classes, what methods they use to teach, and how students learn. They are looking forward to sharing their teaching experience from Palestine and establishing a more direct connection with the teachers and students to later promote online collaboration. The teachers worked weeks before the exchange in order to prepare beautiful PowerPoint presentations about their respective schools, communities, and country.

The teachers did not have too many fears about going to America. However, they were concerned about how to answer questions related to the political situation and their religion. They were nervous about coming 'under attack' about their beliefs and being associated with extremists or terrorists. It was suggested to avoid giving long answers and explanations, or if possible to avoid the topic while in the US. But, at the end of the discussion, the teachers understood that they are going to the US as ambassadors of Palestine and that by answering many questions about themselves they help educate the American public about Palestine – the people, culture, religion and social norms. They left the orientation at ease and ready for this cross-cultural experience.

Content

- Pg 1: Teacher Exchange
- Pg 2: Orientation at UCLA
- Pg 3: Teachers Visit Host Families & My Community
- Pg 4: EXPO Tech
- Pg 5: Community Member trains at local ILC

Orientation Begins at UCLA

After a long journey which began from Palestine then to Jordan and finally the US, the first several days with the teachers focused on logistics and orientation. The teachers were introduced to RI-SOL and UCLA staff, workshop trainers and translators. Additionally, they got acquainted with their new surroundings, which included a tour of the UCLA campus and Moore Hall where they would spend most of their workshop sessions.

Caitlin Drewes, RI-SOL Program Manager, gave an overview of the Teacher Exchange Program and briefed the group on the School Connectivity Program. The teachers were also very happy to receive information on the history of California and Los Angeles. The orientation included an introduction to the American education system,



such as national standards grade levels, structure, teacher qualifications and types of schools.

Indeed it was a long journey for Banan Hammouri, as she explains in her daily journal. Banan is a teacher at Khawlah Bent Alazwar School, in Ramallah. Originally from Hebron and a mother of five children, Banan's fatigue and jet lag would soon be replaced by excitement and anticipation that this new experience would bring. She quickly adjusted to her new surroundings and began to feel welcomed, especially from the Teacher Exchange team. The third day of her stay even included an opportunity to go to a Dodgers game. 'I will not forget – think blue', as Banan describes this first time experience of attending



an American baseball game.

The workshop sessions during the first week concentrated on topics such as introduction to curriculum development, Word and PowerPoint presentations, introduction to information searching and a lesson on Blogging. The second week would take them to the cities of their host families where they would spend several days at local schools experiencing firsthand how the American education system works.

While Bana took a two and one half hour bus ride to Bakersfield to stay with her host family, Anwar Al-mohtaseb, a teacher at Huda AbedalNabi School, headed for a plane ride to Seattle Washington. There, Anwar spent the week at Oroville High School. One of the planned activities for Anwar was to visit the Oroville Chamber of Commerce to give a presentation on Palestine to an audience which included the Head of the Chamber of Commerce, Oroville High School Principal, Mr. Quick, Head of Sossoyah, Canada Rotary Club, the County Forest Ranger and many others. 'After the presentation we had an interactive discussion among the audience and me', An-



Later that day, Gary, a local orchard grower invited Anwar for a tour of Oroville. Later that afternoon they all feasted on a homemade lunch of Mexican burritos made by Gary's wife, Ester. 'I felt at home here at Oroville; everyone went out of their way to make my stay comfortable and productive'.

St. Mary's Ryken School in Maryland was the host school for Mohammad Abu Hatab, a teacher at Al-Hashemyeh Boys School in Ramallah. Mohammad met with the school principal and teachers during a breakfast sponsored by Global Bridges and Connectivity. He spoke about the purpose of his visit to the US and exchanged teaching experiences with his counterparts. During the second and third periods, Mohammad was taken on a campus tour and then spent fourth period finalizing his presentation. Mohammad describes this experience in his daily journal as very important and beneficial: 'I present my presentation to three classes. It was informative and interesting for them. After school, I went to my host teacher's home and had talks in the evening.'



My Community

The objective of this lesson is for students to explore and describe their own community, and to begin to learn about their partner country's community. It is designed as an introductory activity for the students to get to know each other as their yearlong collaboration starts. The final product of this lesson will be used as a reference throughout this school year.

The students will be given the opportunity to describe their school – its history, levels taught, number of students and teachers, subjects taught in class, etc. Each participating student will include a short biography and other important information such as where the community is located on the map, the environment - whether the student lives in an urban or rural area, climate, significant geographical and/or historical landmarks and population. The students will also be encouraged to exchange information on local traditions, holidays, food, religion, arts and literature, local industries, main sources of livelihood (agriculture, industry, private business, etc.), as well as types of media available in the community.



Global Connections' Students Participate in Palestine's ExpoTech

On 12-15 September 2005, Palestinians had a chance to participate in ExpoTech, Palestine's second annual technology exhibition and conference with national coverage in both Ramallah and Gaza. The theme of this year's exhibition was technology's role in education to further support the newly launched Palestine Education Initiative. During this four-day conference, Global Connections and Exchange Project, implemented by Relief International – Schools Online (RI-SOL) was showcased as one of the most successful educational projects in Palestine utilizing technology to improve teaching and learning at the secondary-school level.



For the students participating in the Global Connections Program, the ExpoTech was an ideal opportunity to show to the world how they have been learning with technology and to practice their presentation, marketing, and public speaking skills. Due to students' fantastic performance, the exhibition booth, shared by RI-SOL and HP (RI-SOL's official part-



ner), attracted tens of students and teachers on daily basis. Ten students from Khawlah Bent Alazwar Secondary Girls' School, Betunia Secondary Girls' School, and Al-hashemya Secondary Boys' School presented multiple power-point presenta-



tions and reports produced as a result of their participation in the Schools Online program. Students' interactive presentations demonstrated to many teachers, educators, and government officials the benefits of integrating technology and interactive teaching methods



in education. The excitement among boys and girls grew only stronger, when the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mr. Qrei, and the Minister of Telecommunications and IT, Mr. Sabri Saidam stayed at the booth to watch several of students' presentations.

Students presents projects to prime minister and Telecommunications and IT minister

Expo Tech ...cont.

Another highlight of students' participation in the ExpoTech was an opportunity to market a new Mobile Cart, comprised of 21 laptops, LCD projector, and wireless printer connected to the Internet through a wireless technology, which will soon travel to a Girls' Secondary School in Tulkarem. Sponsored by RI-SOL and HP, the Mobile Cart, will enable students from Tulkarem to participate in the online educational projects offered through Global Connections and Exchange Program and other similar projects. Finally, the students practiced their public speaking skills while being interviewed by the local newspaper "Al-Ayyam". In their interviews, the students highlighted the key issues of their presentation, talked about their participation in the Global Connections Project, and explained why it was important for them to work with technology.



Media coverage

It's never too late to learn



Intesar could not allow her daughter to go to her new evening job at a local internet café alone. She did what many traditional Palestinian mothers probably wouldn't do – Intesar accompanied her daughter, Amal, to work. Intesar, also called Um Jamal (mother of Jamal), is a 51 year old mother of ten children who also works at her Al-Bireh home as a self-employed tailor. Amal wanted to help her mom with the household expenses, and this evening job would allow her to continue her studies during the day.

While at the internet café, Intesar observed how Amal used the computer to communicate with her brothers who live in the US and the United Arab Emirates. Intesar's interest grew as the days progressed, because she too wanted to communicate with her children living abroad. However, Amal just could not spend the time needed to teach her mother basic computer skills.

It didn't take too long before Intesar discovered through friends and neighbors that an RI-SOL Internet Learning Center existed at Khawlah Bent Alazwar Girls' School. She brought along her younger daughter, Lubna and they both registered for classes with the On-site Monitor at the ILC. An experience it was. For Intesar, it was a chance for her to somehow make up for the opportunity lost to finish her high school education - not because she wanted to, but because her family had decided for her. At the ILC, not only has Intesar learned how to use the computer and internet, her English language skills have also improved.



As a tailor, Intesar believes that one day the computer will be of help to her profession, and plans to continue at the ILC so that one day she would be able to make full use of the computer. With such enthusiasm and commitment to learn, we don't doubt it a bit.